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7-315-7623

Water conduit proposal moves forward in House

By CHRIS WOODKA

THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

A proposal that would authorize \$300 million for a conduit to deliver drinking water to the Lower Arkansas Valley has moved to the U.S. House floor.

Rep. John Salazar, D-Colo., a member of the House Transportation Committee, said the Arkansas Valley Conduit will be part of the Water Resources Development Act, which would allow participation by the Army Corps of Engineers.

A parallel effort sponsored by Sens. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and Ken Salazar, D-Colo., and Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., would authorize 80 percent federal funding through the Bureau of Reclamation.

All four lawmakers are supporting both routes.

"It's not a partisan issue," Rep. Salazar said Wednesday. "Support from both sides of the aisle is needed to get this project moving and to make sure that our communities get the clean water they deserve."

Technically, the request for funding will be offered on the floor of the House next week, but Colorado's lawmakers

have strong assurances from Transportation Committee Chairman Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, and ranking Democrat, Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas, that the request will be in final legislation.

Salazar said it's likely only \$34 million will actually be funded next year through WRDA.

"We're not going to get (\$300 million) in one year, but could over the long term. The reality is not all of the project can be funded next year," Salazar said. "We are trying to figure out different avenues of funding."

The conduit is part of the original Fryingpan-Arkansas legislation and would stretch more than 140 miles from the Pueblo Dam to Lamar, providing drinking water to communities along the way.

Sen. Salazar and Allard are sponsoring a public meeting at 2 p.m. July 16 at Otero Junior College in La Junta to meet with the public and discuss the costs of the project.

A study last fall showed the conduit would cost more than \$250 million to build. Officials also are studying a similar pipeline built in Northern Colorado for cost and operations comparison.